VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Title: "ShutterTalk Live Presents: The 5 Most Common Photo Rejection Reasons (And How to Avoid Them)"

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James (00:00:01):

Hello everybody. My name is James and I work in the Content Department here at Shutterstock. Thank you for all for coming to the ShutterTalk today this morning. What I'm going to be focusing on is the top five photo rejection reasons that you may receive if you are a Contributor to Shutterstock, or if you're thinking of being a contributor to Shutterstock, these are some of the rejection reasons that you might get.

James (00:00:26):

So all of the content that is submitted to Shutterstock is reviewed by an individual person. And they look for a certain amount of different things when it comes to evaluating these photos. All of the photos have to be evaluated because everything has to be cleared for our marketplace. Our customers have expectations as to the content quality that they're looking for when it comes to the images in our collection. So we need to make sure that we keep that quality up to par, up on point. So we do this by reviewing the images that get submitted to us.

James (00:01:00):

The rejection reasons are meant to educate you as a contributor. So I know no one likes dealing with rejection. We don't like handing out rejections. It doesn't necessarily mean that your image is poor, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's bad. What it means though, is it just may not meet the quality standards that we have set, that our customers have set for the type of content that they would like in our collection. So we like to accept as much as we possibly can. And currently, the approval ratios are pretty high. Wouldn't say they're extremely high, but they are in your favor. So if you do submit, chances are that your content will get approved, but there is a percentage of content that we end up having to reject. Some of this content, you might be able to make some adjustments to, you might be able to make some improvements and you may be able to resubmit it. And there's other types of content where it just might be in your best interest to save that for sharing in your social networks or keeping in your personal portfolio and not including in our marketplace.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 1 of 22

James (00:02:03):

So like I was saying, I'm going to be going over the top five photo rejection reasons. This is all based on data from 2014. So I went through all the data from 2014 and pulled some of the most common rejection reasons that we see. A lot of the tips that I'm going to be going over might not be, or they might be fairly self-explanatory, might be fairly basic, but I think it's still worth going over these with all of you. And overall, I think this live stream is going to be geared towards newer photographers and newer contributors to Shutterstock. Unfortunately, I won't be able to go over any specific reviews that you may have received, but hopefully by the end of the presentation, you have a better understanding, a better mindset as to where our reviewers are coming from when they're evaluating your content. And you'll be set up for success in the future with what you submit to us.

James (00:02:55):

And also, I just wanted to add too that, we're going to be doing a critique live stream, the first critique live stream that we've ever tried here. We're going to be doing that within the next couple of weeks, within the next several weeks, we're setting that up. So more information to come on that. But basically what's going to be involved in that is you can submit content that either you're thinking of submitting, you'd like to submit, you can submit that to us in advance. We're going to cull some of that content and go over it in a live stream anonymously and go over some of the issues that we see and give you some expectations as to what you can expect if you were to submit content like that.

James (00:03:34):

So that being said, let me move on to the first in the top five photo rejections that we have. I apologize if I sound a little stuffy also in advance, I'm going through a little bit of a cold right now. So hopefully I won't start sneezing, but we'll take it from there if that happens, hopefully it doesn't. All right. So first and foremost, the golden rule in submitting to Shutterstock, I can't stress this enough. I did a live stream in April. So several months ago, I did a live stream and I had this same statement in that live stream as well. This is what you need to do with every piece of content that you're interested in submitting to us. Inspect your images at full resolution prior to submitting. That means opening it up in a editing program, looking at it at a 100%. So you want to really take a look at it at its full resolution. We need to vet our content for a wide range of uses.

James (00:04:30):

So the content you submit to Shutterstock could be used small on a website, could be used in a brochure, or it could be used on a poster somewhere. So we don't specifically know what the customer intends to do with your content. So we want to vet it from a wide range of possible uses. So this is why it's important for you to really look in at a 100% at your image before you submit it. If you see something in there, if you see an imperfection, if you see that something that might be wrong, chances are the reviewer

EXHIBIT 24
Page 2 of 22

Page 2 of 22

will see it as well, because this is how our reviewers evaluate the content. So every image that we get, like I stated earlier, is reviewed by an individual person and the content is looked at full resolution at a 100% in order to evaluate it and to provide the proper review. So don't forget, do that very first before you even pick something to submit to us.

James (00:05:30):

All right. So rejection reason number five is trademark. So this is the most common rejection reason that we have to give for images if we do reject something. And trademark can be broken out into three main subjects, the first one is a visible trademark. So that means that the image contains some visible brand names or logos. The second is intellectual property. So what that means is that the image potentially infringes on intellectual property rights. This one is a little bit more nuanced, it's a little bit vague. So I'm going to go through some specific examples that will hopefully clarify this. And then the last one is the title or keywords that you've selected to describe your image are trademark issues. So the titles and/or keywords contain trademark issues. Now, why do we look for these things? Well, in order to prevent the misuse of a trademark or a logo, we can't accept any images that contain isolated or highly visible trademarks or logos for commercial use. However, that type of content could be submitted for editorial use, but we can't clear it for commercial use in our collection.

James (00:06:43):

Now, visible trademarks in general are very easy to miss. So you need to pay really close attention to everything that's in the scene, pay particular attention to things like clothing and accessories. Brand names can be easy to miss if they're on buttons and things like that. So definitely pay close attention to things like that. When it comes to intellectual property, that is vast and it can also be pretty confusing.

James (00:07:13):

So what we've put together to help you out when it comes to that is within the Shutterstock Contributor blog, we have a lengthy list of known image restrictions. So if you were to receive a rejection for intellectual property, definitely resource that list, go to that list, do a find on that page and see if the subject matter you're shooting is actually on that list, because that list is a fairly exhaustive list of all our current restrictions. It's also lists that we're updating routinely from time to time. I wouldn't say it's updated that on a daily basis, but I would say probably more like on a couple of times a month that's updated with new restrictions. So it's worth bookmarking that, get comfortable with looking on there. There's a lot of things they fall into certain groups that are on there. So if you get a sense as to, okay, this is the policy when it comes to buildings, you'll see a lot of individual building examples that are on there. So get familiar with that.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 3 of 22

Page 3 of 22

James (00:08:11):

When it comes so titles and keyword trademarks, with this, just avoid using them. I mean, it's as simple as that. When you're trying to describe your image so that customers can find it, you should stick with descriptive words and concepts to help the customers find the image versus being ultra specific about what the brand name of that bike is that's in the shot.

James (00:08:36):

So let me go over some quick tips for when it comes to trademark rejections. The first tip is you can rearrange the subject within the shoot. So if you're at a shoot and you have a model that's wearing a coat that has a visible logo on it, maybe you can position things differently so that that logo is obscured and it's not visible. With visible trademarks, you can always try removing them in post-production, but sometimes that can be pretty tricky. So while you're shooting, if you notice something, definitely take care of it right there, and that way, you don't even have to worry about trying to clone it out in post-production.

James (00:09:15):

So be familiar with our restrictions, like I was saying earlier, take a look at that known image restrictions blog, and get comfortable with what's on there and how it's sorted and the types of things that we do have that are on there. There's a couple of broader topics within there when it comes to modern buildings and also isolated vehicles that can be particularly confusing. So pay attention to what our policies are when it comes to that. I have some isolated building examples, some architectural examples that I'm going to share with you in a bit that'll hopefully hit this home so you understand a little bit more as to how we view these things when we're reviewing. In general, though, when it comes to isolated buildings, you're better off not taking a photo of an isolated building, you're better off taking a cityscape or a wider shot of several buildings and focusing just on one. And finally, like I was stating earlier, be descriptive and conceptual when you're describing your images and don't use specific brand names within the keywords or the titles.

James (00:10:22):

All right. So here are two examples. You see the one on the left, rather is a woman with a coffee cup, a coffee cup from Starbucks, and then the image on the right is two shoppers walking by an Apple Store. In both of these examples, the trademarks, the visible trademarks stand out. On the one on the left, you can clearly see the Starbucks logo on the cup that she's holding. Now with that image on the left, while the shoot was happening, what the photographer could have done is had the model turn the cup around so it wasn't visible, because trying to clone out that Starbucks logo in post-production is just going to be really difficult, very time consuming.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 4 of 22

James (00:11:05):

With the one on the right, there's not really a whole lot that can be done in post-processing to fix that. Both of these images could be submitted as editorial. So they wouldn't be accepted as commercial because of these visible trademarks, but you could try submitting these as editorial, as long as you come up with a clear editorial caption that describes the scene. And we have a lot of information in the blog that you can resource as to how to come up with a appropriate editorial caption to describe your editorial photo.

James (00:11:35):

So these next two examples that I want to show you are of isolated buildings and architecture. The one on the left is a very recognizable location. It's actually where we are in right now. So that's the Empire State Building here in New York City. Even though the Empire State Building doesn't have a logo on the side of it that says something like Sony or Coca-Cola anything like that, the building itself is protected. So isolated shots of the Empire State Building are not allowed. If it's part of a cityscape, naturally, it's unavoidable. You're going to see the Empire State Building if you take a photo of the skyline of New York, but in those instances, it's more secondary. It's not the primary focus of the image. So the skyline would be okay as commercial. But that image on the left that you see will have to be submitted as editorial with an editorial caption.

James (00:12:22):

The one on the right, now I didn't know what this building was when I looked it up and I'd be surprised if anyone out there knows what this building specifically is. I actually would be impressed if someone does, but this is a very modern looking piece of architecture. Just from looking at it, you can see that, okay, this was probably created fairly recently. And this building was actually created in 2002. So it's the Nord LB Building in Hanover, Germany. So an image like this, because it's very modern, because it's unique, this would have to be submitted as editorial. You would not be able to submit this as commercial.

James (00:12:55):

Now, if you were to go on the restrictions list that we have, you probably wouldn't see a specific restriction for the Nord LB Building, just because we can't list out every single building that is out there, but because it's isolated, because it's unique, because it's modern, that makes it an issue. So cross-reference that list that I was describing to you, the restrictions list, it'll give you some bullet points and some guidelines and things to look out for when you're taking these types of photos of isolated buildings. In particular, though, I would avoid modern buildings altogether for commercial use. If you're taking a photo of a modern building, if it's a tight crop of a modern building, if it's not a wide shot showing more of the cityscape, I would avoid submitting that for commercial use. However, you are welcome to submit that type of content for editorial use, just make sure you know how to put together the proper editorial caption for your submission.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 5 of 22

James (00:13:47):

And this last example that I just wanted to go through is an example of some title and keyword issues. So if we take a look at this image and the title is women training on a stationary bike at the gym, and then the keywords are women, training, bike, stationary, spinning, trainer, cycling, workout, fitness, health, and CrossFit. So there's actually two terms that are within the keywords, which would result in a trademark rejection for this image. And the two terms, one might be obvious, one might be not as obvious, are spinning and CrossFit. So both of these terms are actually restricted brands. So they're registered trademarks. Spinning is the type of exercise bicycle, which honestly, I don't think this woman is on a spinning bike. So it's probably was a keyword that was added to this image and not even necessary.

James (00:14:39):

And CrossFit as well, I don't know if cycling is involved in CrossFit. I'm not passionate about CrossFit, unfortunately. So, but both of those keywords were added in here, I think probably by the Contributor to think that they could drive more sales on this, but this would have to be rejected for trademark. This type of image, if it didn't receive any additional quality rejection reasons, you could easily just remove those keywords and then resubmit, but that's more time that you have to go through. So better off from the start, don't include keywords like this at all in the titles or the keywords. In the restrictions lists that we have on the blog, we have a number of brands which are very common, but unfortunately, we can't list every single brand that's out there, but if it's a brand, don't include it as a keyword or a title.

James (00:15:28):

All right. So that wraps up the keyword rejection, oh, not, I'm sorry, not the keyword rejection, that wraps up the trademark rejection part. Also, if you have any questions about anything that I'm talking about as I'm going over it, please hold off. Well, you can type in your questions, but we're going to save some time at the very end for answering the questions. So I won't be able to answer them as I'm going through the presentation, but I'll answer the questions afterwards.

James (00:15:53):

All right. So the number four rejection reason is for noise. So the noise rejection reason you'll receive if your image contains excessive noise, film grain, compression, and/or posterization. So the first reason is for excessive noise or film grain. The second one is for if the image contains compression artifacts, and then the third is for posterization. Posterization isn't something we see too commonly, but let me go through each one of these in a little bit more detail.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 6 of 22

Page 6 of 22

James (00:16:24):

Noise, if you're a photographer, you should know what noise looks like for the most part, but it primarily looks like grain or spots on the image. Sometimes it's uniform in color, other times it could be multicolored. And I'll explain a little bit more as to why that happens. Film grain, we don't see too commonly because we don't get a lot of submissions of scans, but that is something that if you're scanning old film, you could see film grain as well. The compression artifacts, we do see fairly often from time to time. And this looks like kind of blocky pixels, almost like a old video game, kind of like an eight bit kind of look to the photo. So we do see this from time to time, and I'll explain in the tips a little bit more how to avoid this.

James (00:17:15):

And then the last one, posterization, we don't see too frequently. It usually happens - It happens for a number of different reasons, but where we commonly see it happening is if a contributor adds a whole lot of effects to their photo. So if they're going in in post-production and they're really experimenting with curves, experimenting with levels, it could result in some posterization. And primarily where we see this is in skies. So if you have a shot of a landscape with a blue sky, really pay close attention to the blue sky, make sure the gradient within the sky is even and take a look and make sure there's no posterization that's in there. And with all of these noise related rejections, we would always suggest you to shoot with a Digital SLR versus a point-and-shoot camera. In general, the higher sensor that you have on that camera, the less potential that you will have with noise.

James (00:18:14):

So here's some tips on how to deal with noise. First tip is to get to know ISO. So really dive in deep and learn all about ISO and what the proper ISO settings are for the scene that you're shooting. In general, the higher your ISO setting is, the more potential for noise that you're going to have. And the lower the setting is, the less issues that you might have with noise. Most cameras have an auto ISO setting. So double check on that Auto ISO setting and ensure what that is set at. And then also, really pay attention to the shadows in your image. So when you're zooming in at a 100% and inspecting your image, pay close attention to the shadows because that's an area where a lot of noise likes to hide.

James (00:18:58):

When it comes to compression, just minimize compression at all, if at all possible. Basically, just avoid compressing your files to begin with. So try to shoot in the TIFF format. If you don't have access to the TIFF format, try RAW. If you don't have access to TIFF or RAW within your camera, then shoot at the highest quality JPEG file that you can shoot at.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 7 of 22

Page 7 of 22

James (00:19:21):

Pay close attention to the compression settings that are set by your camera. What we see from time to time is newer contributors who are shooting in JPEG, they have it set to default settings so the JPEG is being highly compressed and they're usually not even aware of it at all. So your camera might be compressing your files, and you're just not even aware. So just double check on your individual camera settings to ensure that the minimal amount of compression is being applied to your files. What that does mean, though, is your files are going to be a little larger and also if you are going to be opening them up and post-processing afterwards, that might take a lot more of your processing speed on your computer. But I think in general, it's just a good practice to avoid compressing your files.

James (00:20:06):

And then when it comes to posterization, I would advise you to just avoid over-processing, like you could get carried away in Photoshop and add a lot of interesting effects and mess around with the curves and really make some interesting color tones pop out and things like that. But as you're doing that, just pay close attention, once again, looking at your image at a 100% and seeing if there's any areas of the image that are getting posterized. Like I was saying earlier, pay close attention to the skies, really when you're taking landscape photos, zoom in on those skies and make sure that the gradients are smooth in there, because most of the posterization that we do see is visible in the skies.

James (00:20:46):

All right. So I've got a few image examples. So here's an image that's got a really interesting composition, got some really nice leading lines going on, it has some nice symmetry, has some decent color tone, I think in my opinion, it's a little too cool, but overall, I think this is a really nice shot and overall, it looks like it would be acceptable. However, we're also viewing it at about 25% of its original resolution. So if we zoom in a little closer, you'll definitely see and hopefully you can see on your monitors and hopefully this video stream isn't too compressed, but you should be able to see some noise, particularly in the shadow areas of the image within the shot.

James (00:21:26):

So the prominent noise here is most likely due to a higher ISO setting because of the subdued lighting in this scene, and it's also most likely handheld as well. So I think the ISO in this particular example was bumped up to compensate for that. So in order to avoid it, I would suggest using a tripod and lowering the ISO as low as you can go. If you don't have a tripod available at all, then try a number of different settings while keeping it as steady as possible as you possibly can. If a clean shot is absolutely impossible for you in this example, then it might just be an interesting shot that it's worth sharing with your

EXHIBIT 24
Page 8 of 22

Page 8 of 22

social networks, keeping in your portfolio, but it might not be a good one for submitting to us.

James (00:22:13):

All right. So this example of some really nice summer berries, we've got some raspberries and blueberries in here, really nice colors going on. And as we look at this, I'm looking at this at the size that it's at, you can't really see any compression at all, it looks really sharp. However, once again, we zoom in, we can see that this image has been heavily compressed. You can see some of those blocky pixels showing up in the areas between the strawberries, not strawberries, I'm sorry, between the blueberries and the raspberries. And this image was actually an image that I purposely over-compressed to show the results of compression.

James (00:22:50):

And then this last image example right here is a really interesting dynamic sunset with some really cool purple color tones going on in here. And it looks like it was definitely processed in post-production to get some of these effects. And if we zoom in pretty close on the skies, you can definitely see the areas of banding, which is posterizations. So this is what I'm describing when I talk about posterization, particularly in the skies, you can see the posterization between the gradients and the sky at a 100%. And primarily, I think in this example, it was done because of post-production effects.

James (00:23:29):

All right. So moving on from noise, we're going to go into the top three rejection reason. So the top three rejection reason that we receive, or that we tend to give out is for composition. Now, composition can be one of our more subjective rejection reasons. So when we instruct reviewers on using this rejection reason, we try to be as clear as possible for when they can use this. So let me give you the three main areas as to why you may receive a composition rejection. The first one is the arrangement of the subject or visual elements is not optimal. Once again, I completely understand that is a little bit subjective, but I'll share with you some examples of stuff that we see routinely.

James (00:24:12):

The second one is for distracting elements that are entering the frame. And then the third one is for the horizon line is crooked. We get a lot of landscape images that come in where the horizon line is just crooked. And also in a lot of those landscapes as well, we see a lot of distracting elements like tree branches and things like that, light poles, which are in the scene and is just distracting from the overall composition of the image. So all of these things keep in mind when you're composing your image.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 9 of 22

Page 9 of 22

James (00:24:40):

So here's some tips, some handy tips that you can use to avoid composition rejection reasons. First and foremost, learn the rules. A lot of these rules are probably super obvious to you, but it's best to keep them in mind. First and foremost, learn the rule of thirds. Can't stress this enough. Definitely using that rule and incorporating it into your everyday shots will make your images more visually appealing, they'll make them more balanced. So definitely highly recommend using that rule. In addition to that, you can pay attention to leading lines that are in the image. The leading lines will help to draw your potential customer's eye into the image. So you can incorporate leading lines as well.

James (00:25:25):

Also, I would recommend thinking about your image from a customer's point of view. So put yourself in the customer's shoes when you're looking at your image and think, if I'm a customer, what am I going to use this image for? So what is the concept of this image? What does it show? What does it showcase? What does it display? What could I use this for? Images that sell frequently have concepts that can work on many different levels. So definitely take that into consideration. Also, consider negative space. Consider using negative space and utilizing negative space. Overall gives your image a nice balanced feel to it. And in addition to that, it adds potential space for copy. So a lot of our customers like to add text and things like that into the image. So if you're adding some negative space into your image, it gives them more options to do that.

James (00:26:14):

So pay attention to the entire frames. When you're shooting, just really pay attention to what else is entering that frame. Like I was saying earlier, we do see shots where tree branches will be in the frame, sides of fences will be in the frame, people's hands, fingers, things like that. So definitely keep an eye on when you're reviewing your images what's actually in the full frame.

James (00:26:39):

Another thing I can suggest to you here is if you're taking a shot, if you've got a limited amount of time, shoot from a number of different angles. That way, when you get back to your home computer and you're doing some editing, you'll have some other options that you can pick from when selecting the image that you ultimately want to submit to us. And then the last one is to use the in-camera grid. If you're using a camera that has live view, you can definitely use the in-camera grid to pay attention and do a grid overlay of the rule of thirds. It will also help you to frame up the horizon as well, to make sure that the horizon is straight. Some cameras I'm seeing that have actual horizon line built in that'll really help you and keep you cognizant of what the horizon line is so you can keep that image straight.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 10 of 22

Page 10 of 22

James (00:27:30):

So here's some examples I wanted to show to you. So this first example that I have right here, it's actually a crop of a larger image, but just say for - - We'll just think that this is the way that the image was submitted to us. So overall, it's not the best crop of this image. The man is a little too close to the edge, so it kind of leaves a claustrophobic unbalanced feel overall to this image. The subject matter is relatively unclear, the concept is a little unclear. The color tone is nice, the sepia tone is nice, it's got some good things going for it, but this is definitely something where it could have been improved upon. So if we overlay the rule of thirds grid on here, you can see that it's not balanced at all.

James (00:28:16):

Now, if we take a little wider shot of this scene, it gets a whole lot better. And if I overlay the rule of thirds onto here, you can see that the model in the scene lines up perfectly on the rule of thirds line. It's really well balanced, and it even incorporates some negative space as well into the top and into the upper left. So overall, very nice image, well-balanced, has almost a mystical feel to it, could be used to illustrate a journey or something along those lines. So overall, a nice shot.

James (00:28:51):

This second example right here is an example of some leading lines. This is a great shot of a bridge. And it's got leading lines on the road, on the aspects of the bridge itself, really draws your eye into the image. So something like this could be used to illustrate construction industry, the road ahead, it's got a lot of movement involved. So the leading lines really help to guide your eye through this image.

James (00:29:14):

And this last example is fairly simple, but fairly effective. So we've got a nice still life of some flowers on the slate background, utilizing the rule of thirds, the placement there, and also utilizing negative space, giving this image a wide range of uses, could be used for a floral shop, could be used to announce a wedding or something along those lines, possibly even Mother's Day cards, just things like that. It's got a wide range of uses. So this is also an example where you don't necessarily need a model, you don't need to go out and get a model for your shot. You can just get some nice flowers and position this, set the scene up, compose it appropriately in either your home studio or on your kitchen countertop even.

James (00:29:59):

All right. So the second most common rejection reason is focus. So the focus rejection reason is another one that's a little subjective as well because it's not as simple as an image being in focus or out of focus. So let me go through the three main aspects that make up this focus rejection reason. The first main reason why you may receive this focus rejection reason is your image is out of focus, which is fairly self-explanatory. And

EXHIBIT 24
Page 11 of 22

Page 11 of 22

I don't think very often, we see a lot of images which are clearly flat out of focus. If anything, the images that we do tend to see are images where the focus is too soft. So I think more commonly than not, we see ones where the focus is just a little too soft for the overall image. And then the third one, which we see fairly frequently as well, is the image is a little too blurry due to camera shake. So it's a little too blurry to be acceptable.

James (00:30:55):

So here's some tips that you can use when you're approaching a focus. Don't always trust the auto-focus setting that's on your camera. Experiment with a number of different auto-focus settings that you have, or not settings rather, but modes that you have, such as single focus mode and continuous, and learn the benefits and the ways you should utilize each one. In general, you would use the single area auto-focus for stationary subjects, whereas if you have movement going on in your scene, I would suggest using the continuous setting.

James (00:31:31):

So the overall world of auto-focus is very complex. And a lot of cameras have a lot of different settings devoted to this for specific scenes. So really just get out there and experiment. And if you are shooting something, try shooting it from a number of different auto-focus settings to see which one would work best. Also, don't be afraid of using manual focus. Manual focus is always an option. It's a little intimidating. But some of the newer cameras that are out there have some really neat tools that you can take into consideration to get some really sharp and potentially tack sharp shots. There's things such as focus peaking, where it'll actually show within the viewfinder in the live view LCD on the back of the camera, it'll show you which areas of the photo it believes are sharp and in focus. And that really helps you when you're evaluating how sharp your image is during the shoot.

James (00:32:25):

So for soft images, make sure you're using the correct lens for the scene. Zoom lenses traditionally can result in soft focus. So I would avoid those. In general, when you get your first DSLR camera, you usually get it with a kit lens, which is probably going to be a zoom lens. And it's probably going to be a fairly soft lens as well. So rather than relying on the zoom, I would suggest moving in closer to the subject. So zooming out and moving in as close as you possibly can, rather than relying on the zoom, I think it's going to give you a much sharper image and hopefully you won't have to deal with the softness.

James (00:33:07):

And then also with each lens that you have and with your camera that you have, learn how far you can push your lens. Each lens is different and each lens will have its sweet spot area where your focus is going to be the sharpest and the setting that'll work optimally for you. So there's a number of different sites that are out there, which will

EXHIBIT 24
Page 12 of 22

Page 12 of 22

offer very in-depth reviews of lenses and give you feedback as to, okay, the particular lens you have, how much you can get out of it and how much you can expect to get out of it.

James (00:33:35):

And then when it comes to camera shake, which is something that we see very often, stabilize yourself. We realize we don't all carry tripods with us everywhere we go, but we often see interesting photographs everywhere we go. So try to utilize some tools to stabilize yourself. Some things you can do is you can brace yourself up against something. So you can brace yourself up against the side of a building or a tree or you can get creative and you can even lean down and use your knee to help brace yourself and steady yourself.

James (00:34:07):

Also, things as simple as paying close attention to how you're standing and how you're holding the camera. You never want to have your elbows out, for example, that'll make you less stable. So keep your elbows in as much as you possibly can and even learn to control your breathing. I know it sounds a little hokey, but yeah, you don't want to release the shutter when you're in the middle of taking a breath. It's going to cause some camera shake, particularly if you're working at a lower shutter speed. So learn to control your breathing and learn how to release the shutter at an appropriate time when you're in the middle of a breath.

James (00:34:41):

So here's some examples I wanted to share with you on focus. So this first one is a great example of shallow depth of field. And we see a lot of these images. A lot of shallow depth of field use in images of food, it's extremely popular. So this image, if I zoom in right here, you can see it definitely has a point where it is sharp, it is focused. While it is narrow, there definitely is a piece in this photo that is sharp. What we don't want to see is we don't want to have to scroll around this entire image looking for one sharp area. One area of the photos should be sharp, and it should make sense for the composition.

James (00:35:19):

For this photo in particular, say the sprig of mint that's in the background by the raspberries, say that was sharp, that wouldn't be appropriate for this photo. You wouldn't expect that area to be sharp. And our customers wouldn't purchase this expecting that area to be sharp. So our customers can't view these images at full size. So we really need to make sure that when we're reviewing it, that we're accepting it, keeping them in mind as to what we expect them to get from this photo. So this example, yeah, the sharp focus is perfectly fine on the front of that muffin.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 13 of 22

Page 13 of 22

James (00:35:57):

All right. Here's another example of actually poor focus, and this is most likely due to camera shake. So when I zoom in on this a little closer, you can see, and hopefully you'll be able to see from your monitors, that there is a little bit of shakiness going on with the hands and with the coffee mug, not mug rather, with the coffee cup. Fortunately, there's no Starbucks logo on this one. So that's good. So we don't have to worry about a Starbucks trademark issue. But if you zoom out, looks fine, looks perfectly fine. But if we zoom in, you can definitely see some areas where it was a little too shaky and it caused the focus to be unacceptable.

James (00:36:34):

All right. So we're finally down to the number one rejection reason that we have seen. And this number one rejection reason is for exposure. So we frequently see a lot of images that have poor exposure. So the reasons why you may receive this rejection reason is that the image is underexposed, the image is overexposed, or the image was shot in unfavorable lighting conditions. Now we realize if you're on vacation, you're going to be limited in the amount of time you have and the amount of time during the day you might be able to take shots. And it's perfectly fine if the only time available to you is to go out in the middle of the day and take some images, but just keep in mind though, that while you're taking those images, they may not be the best type of content to submit to a Shutterstock for review. If at all possible, try to avoid midday sun, things like that.

James (00:37:32):

So let me go through a couple of handy tips you can keep in mind to avoid an exposure rejection. The first one is to experiment with different metering modes and exposure compensation. So there's like a several different metering modes that you can use to evaluate the light within the scene. And each metering mode can be used in a number of different situations. So learn all about those and learn which is the best one to work in the scene that you're looking to shoot. You can also apply some exposure compensation to your photo as well. So in the shoot, you can experiment with those settings to see and you can even take a couple of different settings and an after the fact, take a look at your photos and decide which one you think works best.

James (00:38:19):

Also, don't ignore the camera's internal light meter. So I think the majority of cameras that are out there have this internal light meter built into the camera, which will evaluate the scene and help to guide you as to how your setting should be for that scene. And if you don't have any internal light meter in your camera, you can always purchase an external light meter as well and use that. The internal one isn't a 100% accurate. So if you're shooting in a studio setting, you're going to most likely want to invest in an external light meter that you can use.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 14 of 22

Page 14 of 22

James (00:38:49):

So, like I was saying earlier, avoid shooting in mid day light. Mid day light is very harsh, it tends to blow things out and you run the risk of getting a rejection reason for an image being overexposed if you're shooting in mid day light. And a lot of times you can't even recover those highlights at all in post-production techniques. So it'd be best to avoid those if you are shooting for stock. If you're not looking to shoot for stock at all, then by all means, go out and shoot as much as you'd like in the middle of the day.

James (00:39:17):

There is a lot of talk about the golden hour and how that's a really ideal time of day where you can shoot. And what the golden hour is it's the first hour of light after sunrise and the last hour of light before sunset. So during these times of day, it results in diffuse lighting throughout the scene, which could be a little bit more flattering, less contrasty and less prone to being blown out. And there's actually some interesting apps for those of you that have iPhones or Android devices, you can get some really neat apps around the magic hour where you can set up alerts and tell you specifically based on where you're located what time the magic hour is occurring. And it'll give you alert, says you're entering magic hour. So then you know at that time you can go run out with your camera and take a ton of photos. And it'll tell you when the magic hour is going to be finishing.

James (00:40:06):

And then learn to interpret the histogram. So every new beginner should learn this, learn what the histogram means. You'll be able to evaluate the histogram right there during the shot and it'll give you a very clear indication of whether your image is underexposed or overexposed. So the histogram is entirely, it's super useful for you. Some of the cameras that are out there as well have a live histogram that you can view as you're taking the shot. If you have a mirrorless camera, you might be able to utilize that. And then right then and there, you'll be able to make the adjustments necessary to give you the optimal exposure.

James (00:40:40):

Overall though, the good thing about the exposure rejection, even though it is the top rejection reason that we do see and having to give from time to time, well, it is the most common rejection reason that we do have. One of the good things about it is it is one of the also most correctable rejection reasons. So if you're shooting in an uncompressed format, if you're shooting in RAW, if you're shooting in TIFF, you can bring those images into a post-production and editing program, and you can go in and sometimes bring back some of those highlights and bump up some of those shadows that are within the image. So that's the good thing about the exposure rejection reasons is a lot of times you can go in, do some post-production effects, do some things with curves, do some things with levels to optimize the exposure, and you may be able to resubmit that image for a secondary review.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 15 of 22

Page 15 of 22

James (00:41:29):

All right. So here's a couple of examples of some good exposure and some poor exposure. This is an example of an image shot in natural light. It's got some really nice exposure, very even tones. It's a nice shot. It's not shot in the mid day sun at all. Nothing has really blown out. So here's an example of an image that would be appropriate and exposure would be fine for the scene. This is also a great example to have a more authentic natural style of photography that a lot of our customers are looking for. It's out of the studio, it's in nature. It's really nice, very authentic.

James (00:42:05):

Now, the other end of the spectrum, here's one that's definitely underexposed and probably not shot during the best lighting conditions either, looks like a very cloudy, dreary day. If this image was brought into some applications in post-production, you could be able to bump up some of these shadows, maybe do some creative things with the sky, with some cropping to make it a little bit more of an interesting composition, but overall, don't get wrapped up too much into spending a lot of time and making these edits. But it definitely is worth experimenting with to see if you can get it to a desirable level.

James (00:42:45):

All right. So now that we've gotten through those top five rejection reasons that you might commonly see, what happens if you do get your image rejected? What do you do from there? Well, first and foremost, don't take it personally. And I know this is very difficult to get across to our Contributors, but we're all passionate individuals, we're all photographers, we're all creative, we're all very passionate about what we do, very attached to our work. And to reiterate something that I said earlier on in the beginning of the presentation, a rejection doesn't necessarily mean that your work is poor. We're not rejecting saying that your image is poor, we're basically saying that it just doesn't meet the standards that we have set forth based on our customer feedback for what should be accepted into our collection.

James (00:43:35):

Second thing is to reference our resources. So we have a lot of different resources available within the blog. Within the Contributor blog, we have specific blog posts that dive into these rejections even further. And I even think that each one of these rejection reasons could warrant their own ShutterTalk, their own livestream. So over the next several months, hopefully we'll be putting together some of these more specific issues. So we can put together an entire live stream just devoted to focus. And I think we could cover that in 45 minutes and probably not even cover everything, but definitely cover more than I was able to in this short amount of time that I'm with you today.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 16 of 22

Page 16 of 22

James (<u>00:44:15</u>):

So use our resources, keep track of the known restrictions list, I can't reiterate that enough, keep it bookmarked, pay attention to that. And you can go to the critique section of the forum. So we just enrolled a new forum, which is pretty neat and they have a really interesting way of dealing with the critique section in the new forum. We had the critique section in the older forum, but it's been a little bit revamped in this new forum. So you can post your photos that you're thinking of submitting to Shutterstock in there or you can post photos that you got that were rejected that you think maybe a reviewer made an incorrect decision. And then you'll be able to get some feedback from some of the other Contributors that we have. A lot of the contributors that are active in there are active Contributors with Shutterstock and do well with Shutterstock. So they're really looking to help out and give new Contributors and established Contributors guidance on what to do.

James (<u>00:45:05</u>):

Sometimes errors do happen within review. So if you get a critique and a lot of Contributors, fellow Contributors are saying, oh, this looks like it may have been a mistake, it may have been an error, then definitely resubmit that image and we'll give it a second review. So that goes in line in line with the last statement if you get rejected, if possible, definitely make corrections and resubmit. I wouldn't resubmit everything that you get that's rejected, but if it's something that can be potentially corrected, like a visible trademark that you might be able to clone out, then definitely try resubmitting that or if you're rejected for exposure and you feel like, oh, I can definitely correct this in post-production or there's a distracting element in the scene that you think you can clone out in an editing program, then definitely do that.

James (<u>00:45:55</u>):

If you are going to resubmit, though, make sure when you do resubmit, you add, we have a dropdown menu that you would select and you would add that you're submitting previously submitted content. So that gives us an indication that this was content that was previously rejected and we'll know to hone in on certain areas. But once again, to reiterate, don't resubmit every single thing that you had that was rejected. And if you do resubmit something and it's rejected a second time, then I would just leave it as is and move on to either something else or move on to something else or just save that image for some other use.

James (<u>00:46:33</u>):

Unfortunately, we're unable to give ultra personalized details as to why an image was rejected. We unfortunately don't have that much time to put into due to the large amount of submissions that we do get on a daily basis. So we try to pick rejection reasons that are fairly self-explanatory and we also link to blog posts and a lot of our rejection reasons that we'll dive into things even further, and hopefully, we'll get live streams as well in the future that will be linked to all the rejection reasons. So you should be able to find a

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EXHIBIT 24
Page 17 of 22

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plethora of information about why your image was rejected and some things you can do to avoid that rejection in the future.

James (00:47:16):

All right. So I think I got through the top five and I got through how not to get too angry if your image is rejected. So what I'm going to do is move on to some Q&A. So we've got some questions here. So the first question that I've got is, is it enough to remove a brand name? Are unique designs also trademarked, for example, a unique man's belt buckle? Yeah, that's a really good question. So there are some objects that are restricted that similar to a man's belt buckle, where even though there's no logo on it, it would still be unacceptable. And if you go into our list of, sorry, I lost my train of thought, restrictions, if you go into our restrictions list, we'll have those common objects that, for example, Burberry pattern. So if you're familiar with Burberry has a very distinctive tartan pattern. That pattern is highly recognizable. We can't accept anything that has that pattern. Levi's jeans, if it has the red tag on the back, even if the word Levi's is removed, the tag is identifiable of Levi's.

James (00:48:27):

When it comes to a belt buckle, the only one that I think of off the top of my head is maybe a Gucci belt buckle, which has a G. So even though it's not necessarily a logo, it's still identifiable with the Gucci brand. Another one, a Rubik's cube. So a Rubik's cube doesn't have identifiable name on it that says it's a Rubik's cube, but everyone knows from looking at it it's a Rubik's cube. So things like that. So yeah, there are some unique designs that are also trademarked. We have a lot of the ones that commonly come up on that known image restrictions list. So take a look on that list and get familiar with it. But we can't post every single potential one that would come up on there, but take a look on that list if you have a question about that.

James (00:49:10):

Second question is, an image is rejected for trademark, it's corrected and resubmitted, the image is then rejected for something else such as the lighting issue, are resubmissions reviewed by the same reviewers second time around? So that's a good question. I have to be a little conservative with how I answer that, and I can't go into the very specifics as to how the review process works, but what we stress to reviewers when they are reviewing is to reject images for all appropriate reasons. So if there is an image that has a trademark issue, but it also has poor exposure, the reviewer should reject it for both. If they happen to just notice the trademark issue the first time it's reviewed, then it may, if you resubmit a second time after correcting the trademark issue, it may receive that second rejection for a quality issue that an initial reviewer didn't pick up on.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 18 of 22

Page 18 of 22

James (00:50:10):

So within the review interface and within the way we do review, we're always looking for ways to improve the workflow to make it as consistent as possible and to make it as clear and concise as possible, because the last thing we want to do, well, one of the last things we want to do is frustrate Contributors. We definitely don't want to do that. And we realize that there are some situations that come up, which can be frustrating. So one thing I can stress to you is we're taking this feedback in very seriously and we're using it to improve the way that we do review. So unfortunately, something like that may happen, but hopefully, it doesn't happen too often.

James (00:50:50):

All right. So could a prominent building be submitted with a property release? Great question. Yeah, so if it's a prominent building and you're able to get a property release from the owner of that building, then by all means include the property release and you can submit it for commercial use. Good luck trying to get a property release from the Empire State Building. I don't think they would be able to give it to you, but if you know the owner of a particular building, it's in your town or in your city that you're going to shoot and you are able to get a release from them, then by all means, you can submit that as commercial use with the property release.

James (00:51:25):

What is an acceptable level of noise for acceptance? So that's a great question. And I don't know if I'm going to have the clearest answer for you, unfortunately. What I can tell you, though, is that when our reviewers are trained and the guidance that we give them when it comes to things like noise, when it comes to things like focus, when it comes to things like exposure, is we have them take in the full photo into consideration, taking the conditions that the photo was shot, taking the styling of the shot, taking a lot of other things besides just what they see when it comes to things like noise.

James (00:52:07):

In low lighting, we realize noise is going to be very unavoidable, or there might be some instances where you add some noise to your image to give it a little bit more of a gritty, more of a grungy feel and get a little bit more creative with it. By all means, you can do that. If you are going to be adding noise to an image, add that in the title of the image, say that you included some noise. It doesn't necessarily guarantee that your image is going to get accepted, but it will give us some additional guidance as to what the creative effect is that you were going for with that image. So I can't say 20% of noise is acceptable, 30% of noise is acceptable. It all is taken into consideration based on a number of different factors within the shot. We do realize, like I said, low light is going to have some noise. So we're going to be a little bit more lenient when it comes to that.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 19 of 22

Page 19 of 22

James (00:52:54):

But images that we do see where there's plenty of light in the scene and it still has noise, chances are there was a mistake that was probably made by the photographer when they took that shot, and they either shot at a higher ISO, or they did something to result in that noise issue. So I know it doesn't specifically answer what you're asking, but unfortunately, we don't have a clear cut level as to when, I can't say, yeah, 40% of noise is acceptable, 20% of noise is acceptable. It all depends on the scene. And reviewers do take the entire scene, the entire composition into consideration when they're evaluating photo.

James (00:53:30):

All right. Fourth one, is software used to review an image initially? So this is great. So we see that, I've seen that come up in a couple of forum threads and people saying, are robots doing review? We're not, no, we don't have any robots that are doing review. All review is being done by human beings. So human beings are looking at these images and they're making determinations on these images. The only type of software, I guess, if you can consider it software that we use is if an image is under the size limit that we require, it'll automatically get rejected out. So if you're submitting an image that's under four megapixels in size, it'll get rejected. So it doesn't make sense to present that to a person to have them just reject it. So why not incorporate an automated way of rejecting that. But we're not using any types of technology to say images above 30% level of noise, reject out. We're just not doing it at all. So yeah.

James (00:54:36):

What about white balance? So that's a good question as well. So what about white balance? I didn't actually dive into white balance in these top five rejection reasons because white balance isn't one of the top rejection reasons that we see, but it definitely comes into play. So when it comes to white balance, I would avoid using auto white balance altogether. Based on the scene that you're shooting, pick a particular white balance setting for that shot, or shoot in RAW and then adjust the white balance after the fact. But we do on occasion have to reject images for poor white balance, but it isn't one of our top five rejection reasons that we see.

James (00:55:15):

Do you have any separate guidelines for high key and low key photos where the photographer purposely over or underexposed the photos? Yes we do. So we have guidelines that we give to the reviewers. We explain to the reviewers, all of them know what these terms are, because they're all experienced photographers themselves. So yeah, we let them know that they are going to be seeing high key and low key photos, and definitely take that into consideration. I mean, you're not going to reject a high key photo for poor exposure because it's going to be intentionally done, whether it was done correctly, that's a different story, but we do take that into consideration.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 20 of 22

Page 20 of 22

James (00:55:52):

Okay. As a newbie, welcome, I submitted 10 images per the instructions. Three were considered acceptable. All right. You're throwing math at me. So I'm going to have to use my fingers. Three were considered acceptable and seven were rejected. As I continue, can I submit seven or must I keep submitting 10 until you've accepted seven? I think I get the gist of this message or this question, I'm not going to read it over again, but I think I got it. So you're submitting 10 and three were acceptable, but seven were rejected. So what I would suggest you do, if at all possible, if you have 10 fresh new photos, submit 10 fresh new photos. If you don't have that available though, then submit those three that were acceptable and submit an additional seven that were rejected. Does that answer the question? I think so, right? Yeah. So yeah, if at all possible, I would submit 10 that were brand new, but if you can't do that, then yeah, definitely submit those three that were considered acceptable and then just pick seven brand new ones to add to those three.

James (00:56:51):

Sometimes I submit an image, I get a rejection for one reason, such as trademark. And once I resubmit, I get a second rejection for a different reason. Is it possible to list all the rejection reasons at once so the photographer can decide if it makes sense to put more effort and resubmit or give up? That's a great question and I completely understand the frustration that you feel when it comes to that. Like I stated earlier in a previous question that was similar, we instruct the reviewers to use all applicable rejection reasons possible. So if there is an image that has a trademark issue and it also has poor exposure, the guidance that we give to the team is to select both of those reasons. So does it happen from time to time? It might happen from time to time, but hopefully, it doesn't happen too often or not. I can also tell you when it comes to reviewers, we have a dedicated team of coordinators that are here in the office who work directly with the reviewers.

James (00:57:47):

And we use a lot of data-driven reports. So we're really in tune with keeping on track of what our reviewers are doing, keeping on track of what rejection reasons they are using, keeping on track on auditing them on a regular basis. We do regular meetings with the entire team, regular individual meetings with the individual reviewers. So we're heavily invested and heavily involved in training them, in retraining them if possible, and addressing any kind of errors that may have been made. So in your example, if a technical rejection wasn't applied the first time around, that might be an instance where we would directly go to that reviewer and give them guidance and make sure that they continue going forward to select all applicable rejection reasons for that image.

James (00:58:35):

Okay. Are your quality standards different for editorial images? So that's a great question. So in general, yes. In general, yes. We realized, and here's the why. So with editorial images, we realize a lot of that stuff can't be planned, you're not in a studio shooting

EXHIBIT 24
Page 21 of 22

Page 21 of 22

something, unless you're shooting a product shot for illustrative editorial, but for most editorial instances, it's on the fly, you're at an event so you're not going to be able to have the proper lighting setup and really keep track of your camera settings and things like that. So we definitely are a little bit more lenient when it comes to editorial because we realize most of these shots are taken at the spur of the moment and not a lot of planning can be involved.

James (00:59:18):

And then do you accept mobile images that's a good shot? So not a good shot. That's a good question. Stuck in talking about photography for an hour. Do you accept mobile images? Yeah, we do. We do accept mobile images. The chance of rejection is going to be a little higher if you are submitting a mobile image just because of the restrictions with a lot of the technology that's involved in mobile photography, you're going to see a lot more noise, you're going to see a lot more image compression, you're going to see a lot more exposure issues as well. But if you have a great mobile shot and you want to submit it to us, we'll definitely consider it, but I can tell you that the acceptance ratio for mobile images is going to be definitely lower than if you're shooting with a professional Digital SLR. But as the technology gets better, who knows, we could see a lot more higher approvals when it comes to mobile content.

James (01:00:12):

I think we're good. All right. We're good. Had a lot of great questions. And I think we'll probably follow up if we have some additional questions that I wasn't able to get to and we'll follow up with those. We'll also follow up when we post this up, the recording of it, we'll provide you with a number of different links, some things that I went over to reiterate those. So thanks everybody for attending. I hope this was helpful. Like I said, we're going to be doing a lot more live streams related to content review in general. So look forward to those coming up. So thanks again. So goodbye from New York. Thanks guys.

EXHIBIT 24
Page 22 of 22

Page 22 of 22